

## Table of Contents

**Leaders for Democracy Participant Reflects on Experience in Washington, D.C. ...Page 1**

**Symposium on Community and Technical Colleges Brings BMENA and U.S. Experts Together to Advance Education for Employment ...Page 2**

**IREX Conducts Two MEPI-Sponsored Workshops in Bahrain ...Page 3**

**MEPI-Sponsored Workshop Promotes Citizen Engagement ...Page 4**

**Gulf Election Officials Observe Indonesian Elections ...Page 5**

**US-Saudi Women Summer Symposium on Social Entrepreneurship ...Page 5**

**Nablus Moot Court Competition Wows the Legal Community ...Page 5**

**Women in Law Participants Featured in a Short Documentary ...Page 6**

**MEPI in the Press ...Page 6**

## Connect with MEPI

All current and former participants in MEPI projects and programs are welcome to take advantage of the information and resources offered on the Middle East Partnership Initiative Alumni Network website at [mepialumni.state.gov](http://mepialumni.state.gov). The site offers latest news, announcements, and opportunities to MEPI alumni across the region. Alumni can register at [mepialumni.state.gov/register](http://mepialumni.state.gov/register).

The MEPI Alumni Network also has a presence on Facebook where participants from different programs can meet, network, and share event photos and stories. To join the official MEPI Alumni group please visit: [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2345164412](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2345164412)

## Leaders for Democracy Participant Reflects on Experience in Washington, D.C.



"Turning a belief into a mission." This is what Tala Abu Taha is doing after completing the three-month Leaders for Democracy fellowship in the U.S., March 15 -June 15, 2009, at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University.

U.S. Embassy Amman's Cultural Affairs staff met with Tala, an award-winning journalist and a professional business woman, after her return from the program, which provides young civic and democratic reform leaders from the Middle East and North Africa with the opportunity to complete six weeks of academic coursework including topics on leadership and democracy, followed by a six-week professional assignment with political, non-governmental, or public policy organization of professional interest in Washington, D.C.

Tala was placed as an intern at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the United States Congress. Of her experience with the program and in the U.S., Tala had this to say: "I now know how democracy is practiced and realized in the U.S. I got the chance to observe meetings, prepare hearings, and realize how an effective tool lobbying is in democratic societies such as the U.S. Arabs living in the U.S. should lobby more effectively to have their voices heard."

For the final assignment, as participants developed projects on promoting democracy in their home countries, Tala focused on the role of corporations in advancing democracy. "The corporation is the new power for democracy in Jordan; they can be the eye of the people," she said.

Tala plans to run for membership in the MEPI Alumni Steering Committee next year, to build on the experience and engage in an ongoing learning experience. "The journey will not end here. We, the 2009 LDF fellows, agreed to create an association to continue the path to democratization."

### **Symposium on Community and Technical Colleges Brings BMENA and U.S. Experts Together to Advance Education for Employment**

On July 16-17, U.S. government officials and representatives of local educational institutions in the Broader Middle East and North Africa region (BMENA) region met in Amman, Jordan for the BMENA Symposium on Community and Technical Colleges. The symposium provided an opportunity for both U.S. and BMENA-based stakeholders to renew their shared commitment to broadening global access to quality education.



Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Vocational & Adult Education at the U.S. Department of Education, Glenn Cummings, led the U.S. delegation, which included the U.S. Ambassador to Jordan Stephen Beecroft and several community college presidents, researchers, and organizational leaders from across the country. Jordanian Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Minister of Education Walid Ma'ani delivered the keynote address. Representatives from the private sector, government, and community and technical colleges from Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen attended the two-day event.

In his keynote address, Minister Ma'ani noted that the symposium came at an opportune time, as the Jordanian government is reviewing its higher education, including vocational, technical, and community college education, model carefully and "comparing it with other successful global models for the purpose of jump-starting and bringing it up to date." Minister Ma'ani was confident that the symposium would provide a forum to discuss Jordan and the region's revitalization efforts, saying that, "We need a roadmap for technical and community college education in our society in the days to come, and I am sure this conference will contribute to this very objective."

In his remarks during the opening session, Ambassador Beecroft echoed the timeliness of the symposium, noting that it "comes at a time when both the United States and governments in the region are facing global economic and social challenges." He added: "We must think differently about how we meet the needs of our young people so they can be productive participants in the workforce and constructive contributors to society. We must find innovative strategies to partner across government, education, and the private sector to foster creative solutions to these issues."

U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary Cummings also helped set the context for the symposium, reiterating President Obama's June 4 statements, affirming that, "the United States seeks to pursue new partnerships with governments, citizens, community organizations, religious leaders, businesses and international organizations in the areas of education, economic development, science and technology and health." He noted: "As the United States develops an international education strategy, students from North Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia will be one of its top priorities as they will be engaged in several education-related initiatives, including exchange programs, scholarships and e-learning."

For two days, the 100 participants exchanged ideas through presentations and interactive dialogues on economic trends impacting postsecondary education, as well as policies and practices that improve the alignment of education and workforce



needs. U.S. participants learned about the educational innovations currently taking place in BMENA countries, and participants from the region benefited from hearing how community and technical colleges in the United States are responding to these important growth areas. Recognizing the benefits of cross-cultural exchanges to the development of a modernized and robust higher education sector, Minister Ma'ani shared his view that, "a viable system of higher education is one based on diversity of spheres, multiplicity of disciplines and sub-systems, not one based on imposition of uniformity. A viable, healthy system is also one which capitalizes on its own strengths and is open to positive influences, and best practices, from abroad."

The symposium was sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs' Office of the Middle East Partnership Initiative, the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Agency for International Development, and was implemented with the assistance of the Jordanian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, as well as Al-Balqa Applied University. The event builds on commitments made by G-8 leaders and BMENA countries at Sea Island, Georgia, in June 2004 with the aim of addressing key education reform issues in the BMENA region.



### IREX Conducts Two MEPI-Sponsored Workshops in Bahrain

As the primary implementer of MEPI's regional media reform program, IREX leads a holistic project to increase the professionalism and sustainability of independent media in the Middle East and North Africa. These efforts include technical assistance on code of ethics and access to information. In June, two workshops were held in Bahrain to bring together journalists, associations, editors and publishers to discuss guidelines for reporting and freedom of information. The Code of Ethics workshop and the Access to Information workshop are described below.

#### Code of Ethics Initiative



As a result of the Code of Ethics workshop held June 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> in Manama, the Bahrain Journalists Association (BJA) is developing a unified code of ethics for Bahraini reporters and editors. IREX Consultant David McCraw, a former journalist and now Vice President and Assistant General Counsel at the New York Times Company, presented guidelines for journalism codes of ethics to reporters and editors from leading newspapers in Bahrain. McCraw used examples from journalist organizations in and outside the Arab world to facilitate a discussion of widely-accepted principles of journalism ethics and professional practices.

McCraw told participants that a draft code of ethics can be based on six fundamental principles: accuracy in reporting, fairness, integrity (including the avoidance of or appearance of conflicts of interest), independence, editorial judgment and accountability to the public. While there was general consensus on fundamental journalistic values of accuracy and fairness, there was a great deal of discussion about issues related to conflicts of interest and the freedom of journalists to participate in political events or to hold second jobs. BJA specifically requested that a draft code of ethics address topics related to reporting on sectarian issues.

Based on input from participants on the first day of the workshop, McCraw developed a draft which was examined over the course of the second day of the workshop. That draft was further revised, based on additional discussion, and was presented to the BJA at the workshop's conclusion. BJA Chairman Isa Al-Shaji announced that the organization will publish the draft in newspapers and set up a committee to obtain comments and feedback, including ideas on how to monitor and enforce the code of ethics. Once the code is finalized, the BJA will invite journalists and outlets to sign and adopt the code.

#### Access to Information Initiative



Approximately 50 Members of Parliament, journalists, government officials, and civil society group representatives from Bahrain attended the June 6<sup>th</sup> Access to Information workshop in Manama, Bahrain. Conducted as a roundtable discussion, this workshop was facilitated by the Bahrain Transparency Society and the Bahrain Journalist Association and focused on access to information in Bahrain. Participants also discussed the Access to Information Law currently under consideration in Bahrain's parliament.

The workshop presenters, a group comprised mostly of legal experts, including Richard Winfield, former counsel for the Associated Press and chair of the International Senior Lawyers Project, provided an overview of freedom of information principles as well as elements and mechanisms of access to information laws in Bahrain. Two representatives from the Yemeni Parliamentarians Against Corruption (YemenPAC) presented their own draft Access to Information Law and discussed how it had been developed by parliamentarians with IREX and ISLP assistance over the past year. The YemenPAC representatives reviewed key elements of their draft law and discussed how it complies with international freedom of information standards. A number of workshop participants felt the Yemeni law set a positive example and they suggested that specific elements of the law should be considered for Bahrain's draft law.

At the workshop's closing, the Bahrain Transparency Society (BTS) and the Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS) announced their intention to form the Access to Information Coalition to promote freedom of information. The BHRS and BTS will hold a local workshop in the near future to begin the formation of the coalition, which will include the Bahrain Journalists Association, the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce, Bahraini business societies, academic and civil society groups, media representatives, and other stakeholders.

## FEATURES

### MEPI-Sponsored Workshop Promotes Citizen Engagement



The Parliamentary Staff Training and Technical Assistance project, funded by MEPI, supports the U.S. National Conference of State Legislatures' (NCSL) extensive work with members of the Algerian National Assembly and Algerian Senate. The program's goal is to improve transparency and increase the connection between legislators and citizens in Algeria.

As a part of this ongoing program, NCSL organized a three-day workshop titled, "Civic Engagement and Public Outreach" June 20-22

at the National People's Assembly in Algiers, which featured U.S. legislators speaking on civic engagement strategies. The Algerian delegation was comprised of members and staff of both houses of the Algerian parliament. U.S. participants included delegation chair Texas State Senator Jeff Wentworth, Iowa State Senator Jack Hatch, Arkansas House Majority Leader Steve Harrelson, Colorado Representative Ellen Roberts, Catherine Keig from the office of the Senate President Pro Tem in California, NCSL Director of Trust for Representative Democracy Dr. Karl Kurtz, and Program Coordinator Christy Delafield. The U.S. presenters shared their expertise and insights on the U.S. legislative process with their Algerian counterparts. Representative Kamal Elaid of the Algerian National People's Assembly appreciated the opportunity to hear from U.S. legislators on civic engagement, saying, "Informing citizens and having them participate [in law-making] is essential for local development."

At the workshop's conclusion, Dr. Boualem Tatah, Director of the Algerian Department of Legislative Training and Research for the National Assembly was positive about this event and others facilitated by NCSL: "As a result of the training and assistance from NCSL and U.S. faculty, we have begun to implement concrete procedures to understand and improve constituent services." This is the eleventh workshop NCSL has held for the Algerian Parliament.

The International Programs Department of NCSL acts as a liaison between state legislatures and international and regional organizations, foreign embassies, and parliamentarians from other countries, as well as domestic organizations with international interests. NCSL's International Programs Department conducts research, holds public policy conferences and forums, and develops technical assistance projects and exchange programs.

### Gulf Election Officials Observe Indonesian Elections



The Center for Democracy and Election Management at American University (AU) recently conducted a MEPI-funded study tour of Indonesia's Presidential election July 5-10, 2009. Eight election officials from Yemen, Qatar, and Bahrain received training in observation methodology and election procedures. They also met with representatives of KIPP, the largest domestic observation network, and the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES).

On July 8<sup>th</sup> 2009, Election Day, the group was split into three sub-groups, with each cohort visiting four to ten polling stations. Overall, participants were surprised by the election's simplicity and good organization, and noted the positive impact of outdoor polling locations. They were somewhat disappointed with the short polling hours and lack of available sophisticated technology, and they debated the importance of electronic voting mechanisms.

As a result of the tour, participants agreed to create an Association of Election Officials in the Gulf. Both Bahrain and Qatar have formal requests pending with their respective governments, and the group as a whole has sent a letter to the Gulf Cooperation Council. The Yemeni delegation announced that they have already received approval from their government to join in such an association, once created, and received an enthusiastic response from the executive branch of the Yemeni government.

## FEATURES

### US-Saudi Women Summer Symposium on Social Entrepreneurship



The much-anticipated second event of the U.S.-Saudi Women's Forum, the Summer Symposium on Social Entrepreneurship, was held at Babson College in Massachusetts from July 10-25<sup>th</sup>. This symposium followed the April introductory seminar at Dar Al Hekma College (DAH) in Saudi Arabia, which equipped 100 students from three Jeddah colleges with business and leadership skills related to public policy.

The most recent symposium provided 30 students and three Dar Al Hekma faculty members with a deeper understanding of social entrepreneurship in practice. The participants left with a proposed business plan to implement a group service project in Jeddah, which included working closely with successful local female entrepreneurs.

The U.S.-Saudi Women's Forum is a one-year public-private partnership sponsored by the U.S. State Department that provides an opportunity for Saudi women to explore civic action and enhance business and leadership skills to solve social problems. The forum's goals are to increase Saudi participants' knowledge of social entrepreneurship, increase participants' involvement in socially-responsible community activities, and provide Saudi and American women an opportunity to communicate via interactive online tools. The Forum is funded by a MEPI grant to ICF International, who designs and implements the program through partnerships with Dar Al Hekma, a private all-girls college in Jeddah, the Center for Women's Leadership at Babson College, and the Wellesley Centers for Women at Wellesley College.

ICF International created and maintains an online social network ([us-saudiwomensforum.ning.com](http://us-saudiwomensforum.ning.com)) so participants in the program can build and maintain relationships and exchange ideas, and a blog ([us-saudiwomensforum.blogspot.com](http://us-saudiwomensforum.blogspot.com)) to provide a forum for ongoing discussion. The blog is also a medium for the community-oriented young women in Jeddah to communicate with and learn from the international social entrepreneurship community and the public at large.

The program will culminate at the end of 2009 with a Social Entrepreneurship Fair. Open to the broader community in Jeddah, the fair will showcase the student's service projects, and a panel of distinguished judges will award pilot grants to the top student business plans. Students will be encouraged to maintain connections with each other, and also to reach out to other women in Saudi Arabia to discuss social entrepreneurship ideas and opportunities. MEPI and ICF expect that a robust network of U.S.-Saudi Women's Forum alumni will maintain the momentum of women's civic action in Saudi Arabia.

### Nablus Moot Court Competition Wows the Legal Community



During June and July, more than 100 young women lawyers and several male law students in Lebanon, the West Bank and Kuwait attended local legal training workshops in conjunction with MEPI's Women in Law project, known as WILpower.

The July 27-28 workshop in Nablus in the West Bank, hosted with the cooperation and support of Al Najah University Law Faculty, gave attendees the chance to build their legal skills. The highlight of the workshop was the moot court competition, which gave participants, many for the first time, the opportunity to test their oral pleading abilities in a mock court. Three judges from the Nablus courts evaluated the participants, marking the first time members of the judiciary had ever provided insight and expertise to local legal workshops. A young male law student, Shafiq Jamous, an alumnus of the MEPI Student Leaders program, won the moot court competition and was praised by all three judges for his delivery of the oral pleadings. The judges provided constructive criticism and feedback to all the participants, as well as encouragement in pursuing their legal careers. Overall, the judges were enthusiastic about offering their expertise and engaging with young lawyers. They lauded the moot court training, suggesting that similar trainings be run in different cities throughout Palestine.

The WILpower project is implemented by the Academy for Educational Development and provides training and networking opportunities for young women lawyers and law students in the MENA region. More information can be found at [www.womeninlaw.net](http://www.womeninlaw.net).



## EVENTS & NEWS

### Women in Law Participants Featured in a Short Documentary



The Academy for Educational Development (AED) recently produced a short documentary film highlighting the courage and conviction of young female legal practitioners' work in the Middle East. The documentary is part of AED's MEPI-funded Women in Law (WILpower) project which aims to build the skills of women legal professionals throughout the region.

Please click the photo or visit [www.womeninlaw.net](http://www.womeninlaw.net) to watch the video.

## MEPI in the Press and Publications

### Santa Fe plays host to Mideast students

Santa Fe New Mexican

<http://www.santafenewmexican.com/Local%20News/Inspiration-Abroad>

### International students reflect on visit to Wausau

Wausau Daily Herald

<http://www.wausaudailyherald.com/article/20090728/WDH04/907280304/1619>

### Middle East meets West to build understanding

Great Falls Tribune

<http://www.greatfallstribune.com/article/20090727/NEWS01/907270303>

### Saudi students attend entrepreneurship session

Boston Globe

[http://www.boston.com/yourtown/news/wellesley/2009/07/saudi\\_students\\_attend\\_entrepre.html](http://www.boston.com/yourtown/news/wellesley/2009/07/saudi_students_attend_entrepre.html)

### 200 expected at MEET meet

BTN

[http://www.impactpub.com.au/micebtn/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=4632&Itemid=50](http://www.impactpub.com.au/micebtn/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4632&Itemid=50)

### Yemeni human rights female journalists get glitter

Yemen Observer

<http://www.yobserver.com/culture-and-society/10016881.html>

### 50 students complete first phase of Youth Leadership Program

AME Info

<http://www.ameinfo.com/204038.html>

### Student leaders get taste of American life

Wausau Daily Herald

<http://www.wausaudailyherald.com/article/20090722/WDH0101/907220553/1981/WDHopinion>

To find out about more MEPI news and upcoming events please visit: <http://mepi.state.gov/>